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Comparative Resources: Continental Philosophy and Daoism

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Table of Contents

Articles

ERICA BRINDLEY	
Spontaneous Arising: Creative Change in the <i>Hengxian</i>	1
STEVEN BURIK	
Comparative Resources: Continental Philosophy and Daoism	18
FRIEDERIKE ASSANDRI	
Stealing Words: Intellectual Property in Medieval China	49
SHU-WEI HSIEH	
Possession and Ritual: Daoist and Popular Healing in Taiwan	73
GEORGES FAVRAUD	
Immortals' Medicine: Daoist Healers and Social Change	101
MARNIX WELLS	
Daoism Not as We Know It	121

Forum on Contemporary Practice

SCOTT PARK PHILLIPS AND DANIEL MROZ	
Daoyin Reimagined: A Comparison of Three Embodied Traditions	139
ANDREW COLVIN	
Nonaction and the Art of Blending: Daoist Principles in Aikido	159
DAVID HESSLER	
Teaching with Dao	173

AVERY MORROW	
How Not to Be Thinged by Things	185

YANXIA ZHAO	
Daoist Longevity and the Aging Society	194

News of the Field

Obituaries	211
------------	-----

Publications	214
--------------	-----

Newly Founded	221
---------------	-----

Conferences	223
-------------	-----

Science on <i>Qi</i>	226
----------------------	-----

Contributors	233
--------------	-----

Articles

Comparative Resources

Continental Philosophy and Daoism

STEVEN BURIK

Abstract

I argue that continental philosophical resources are more appropriate for comparative philosophy regarding classical Daoism since they in various ways challenge the dominant metaphysical orientation of Western thought and give us a better and more appropriate vocabulary to make sense of important Daoist ideas within the confines of Western languages.

Since classical Daoism is largely non-metaphysical or at least not metaphysical in the same way as the Western history of philosophy is, it makes sense that those within the Western tradition who have sought to displace the dominant metaphysical tradition would be more in tune with such non-metaphysical considerations. I focus on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida and present three interrelated areas of comparison with classical Daoism. First, I discuss the constant complication of any seriously dualist approach and with that the attempt to put humans in a constructive and primarily interdependent relationship with the rest of the world, which points to a form of process philosophy. Second, I focus on ideas regarding the use and limitations of language that both traditions display, and on the resulting efforts to understand language differently. Lastly, I present the decentering of the subject or the self is another feature prominent in both Daoism and the continental thinkers, although in different ways.

Is it a coincidence that many comparative philosophers have employed the philosophies of continental thinkers in their efforts to understand and engage philosophies from other cultures? Or is there more to it? Many of the most influential comparative thinkers until today have at

least dabbled with continentals, or have been involved with them in some way even though continental thought was not their specialization.

Several comparative thinkers have employed continental ideas in relation to Chinese thought. First, there are the famous volumes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (1987) and *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (1991), both edited by Graham Parkes, where well-regarded scholars explore the relations between Heidegger, Nietzsche, and various strands of Asian philosophies. A. C. Graham has employed the idea of deconstruction in Derrida, most importantly in *Disputers of the Tao* (1989). He notices profound similarities: "The affinity of Laozi and Derrida is that both use reversal to deconstruct chains in which A is traditionally preferred to B, and in breaking down the dichotomy offer us a glimpse of another line which runs athwart it—for Laozi the Way, for Derrida the Trace" (1989, 227, 323).

Furthermore, Hall and Ames, in their *Anticipating China* (1995), argue that the perspectivism in Nietzsche, the destruction inherent in Heidegger's approach to ontology, and Derrida's attacks on the metaphysical language of presence are important contributions to understanding classical Chinese thought. As such, we can expect the language of these thinkers to be more conducive to conveying the intricacies of certain parts of classical Chinese thought. For example, they take Derrida's notion of *différance* to be well suited to explain at least partly certain important language features of classical Chinese thought (1995, 228). James Sellmann observes that Zhuangzi's approach shows affinity to the core of deconstruction, "drawing attention to the liminal concepts and propositions that support philosophical systems" (1998, 164).

Other prominent scholars have written about the affinity between Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida on one side, and classical Chinese thought, mainly in the form of Daoism, and Chan or Zen Buddhism on the other. While I realize that merely mentioning comparative scholars and their interest in continental thinkers does not constitute a special bond, I do indeed think that there is more to the connection.

One point of caution: it might also be the case that some continental philosophers are drawn to Daoism because of the fact that they find it easier to apply their ideas to it. In addition, there are even suggestions that thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger may have—unwittingly or in full knowledge—appropriated key ideas of Chinese thought into

their own work. Reinhard May's *Heidegger's Hidden Sources* is a good example.

Still, it may well turn out that continental philosophy is more conducive to comparative thought than standard or traditional Western thought, which I conflate with and summarize under the term "metaphysics." My claim is that classical Daoism is largely non-metaphysical or at least not metaphysical in the same way as the Western history of philosophy is understood to be. If this is true, then it makes sense that those within the Western tradition who have sought to attack the dominance of this version of metaphysics would be more in tune with such non-metaphysical considerations, and the most famous continental philosophers in this attacking line are Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

In the following, I present three interrelated areas of comparison of their way of thinking with classical Daoism. First, there is the constant complication of any seriously dualist approach and with that the attempt to put humans in a constructive and primarily interdependent relationship with the rest of the world, which points to a form of process philosophy present in both traditions. Second, I focus on the ideas on the use and limitations of language that both traditions display, and on the resulting efforts to understand language differently. Lastly, the decentering of the subject is another feature prominent in both Daoism and the continental thinkers, although in different ways. My focus will rest more heavily on Heidegger and Derrida, but I will show Nietzsche to have similar concerns in many areas.

Complicating Dualism

Thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida have spent considerable time thinking through and attacking the dominant metaphysical position and its resultant dualistic character. There are of course many significant differences between the attempts at overcoming dualism from the Daoists and the continental thinkers. For example, Daoists never had to struggle against a dominant and exclusive metaphysics, or with its offspring in the form of creator-god religions, and consequently their approach to dualism is much more one of balancing than of overcoming.

In fact, as many scholars have pointed out, the only way to see Daoism as non-metaphysical is in recognizing that it was not overly con-

cerned with metaphysical issues in the first place (e.g., Hansen 2010). Nevertheless, I still think that the way of thinking behind both ways of doing philosophy is similar, and I will focus on these similarities.

Dualism is one of *the* defining features of most Western metaphysical philosophies,¹ and as such does not fit well with Daoism, where dualism is constantly complicated, denied, or given a different interpretation. The strength in recent continental philosophy lies in trying to undo the metaphysical emphasis on dualism by actively searching for different ways of thought, which compares well especially with Daoism. Complicating dichotomies is what both post-modernism and Daoism do. The dominant Western metaphysical tradition is quite narrow-minded in that it sets rigid limits to what can be called philosophy and what not, and as such traditionally has conveniently identified Daoism as esoteric, mystical, primitive, or non-philosophy.

Instead, in recent continental thinking we find much more conducive explorations of ideas of difference and sameness, which reveal an effort to bring back the correlativeness into thinking, as opposed to that kind of thinking that has been dominated for a long time by dualism and its forms of isolation and separation. The strategy used by most continental thinkers is a preliminary reversal of the hierarchy within dualistic pairs, followed by a complication of the dualism of the pair itself.

This seems to be the exact same strategy as classical Daoism employs. Graham has argued that whether or not dualism is a feature of thinking per se or not, it is still a fact that the standard form of Western dualism has tended to think in hierarchies and oppositions, with one

¹ The idea of metaphysics I use is narrow on purpose, and in line with Derrida, who defines metaphysics as "the enterprise of returning 'strategically,' 'ideally,' to an origin or to a priority thought to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order then to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just one metaphysical gesture among others; it is the metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent" (1988, 236). There may be other forms of metaphysics, but I do not address those here.

side of any dualist pair establishing superiority or even annihilating the other, whereas classical Chinese philosophy has been more concerned with thinking of opposites as complementary ends of a spectrum (Graham 1989, 331-32). Let me continue by pointing to some examples where the continental thinkers complicate traditional dualism.

Nietzsche

Starting with Nietzsche's work, we can say that it is mostly concerned with overturning the metaphysical tradition before him. Many of his themes are diatribes against dualism, often in the form of profound criticisms of the ideas of objectivity and truth. Nietzsche's skepticism and perspectivism are direct examples of this, since he recognized that to search for Truth with a capital T is futile, and thus the standard approach of metaphysics is denied. But Nietzsche goes further, since he does not provide a new truth or principle, but instead in his skepticism seeks to overcome that particular way of thinking in terms of truth so characteristic of dualist metaphysics, for example in his idea of the *Übermensch*, which has been compared to either the sage (*shengren*) or the genuine person (*zhenren*) on numerous occasions.

The idea of the eternal return seeks to upset the alpha to omega linearity of metaphysics. The death of god so famously proclaimed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is an obvious attempt to undo the dichotomy between this life and afterlife, with the further ideas of the immortal soul versus the mortal body and of the ideas or forms versus matter being complicated as well.

On another level, both the overturning of values and *Beyond Good and Evil* seek to overcome the whole system of dualism altogether. The most obvious example here is found in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of which the title says enough, and where right in the beginning Nietzsche says that the "fundamental belief of metaphysicians is the *belief in oppositions of values*. . . . But we can doubt, first, whether opposites even exist and, second, whether the popular valuations and value oppositions that have earned the metaphysicians' seal of approval might not only be foreground appraisals" (Nietzsche 2002, 6).

In all these cases, Nietzsche starts with a reversal strategy, yet this is not so much to turn a given dichotomy around, but to overcome the di-

chotomy as a whole. Moreover, Laozi and Zhuangzi are well known for employing reversal for the same strategic reasons. Laozi for example emphasizes the so-called yin qualities, but only as a strategic counterbalance to the perceived dominance of the more yang, and in the end to come to the understanding that both are part of the workings of *dao*.

Heidegger

Next let us consider Heidegger's *aletheia* as a possible other version of the idea of truth that the Daoist might find more palatable. Opposing the idea that "truth" is the correctness of our assertions, or the correspondence of what we say with how the world is, Heidegger presents *aletheia* as the play between unconcealing and concealing, as the way in which the world operates. In Heidegger, unconcealing truth is always also concealing, and the clear and distinct objective knowledge of things as they are is forever relegated and subsumed under the awareness of the interplay between concealing and unconcealing. The ground is reversed into the abyss (*Ab-grund*). As Heidegger puts it: "Truth is never only clearing, but also holds sway as sheltering-concealing, equally originally and intimately along with clearing. Both, clearing and sheltering-concealing, are not two but rather the essential swaying of the one, of truth itself" (1999, 244).

Similarly, in Daoism there is a distinct appreciation of the mystery or inaccessibility or ineffability of *dao*, or the way the world works. *Dao* always stays in the background, it never becomes present. For example, in *Zhuangzi* everything has its "this" and "that," from one perspective things light up in a certain way, but this means that some other perspective or way that these things also are, gets obscured. Concealing and unconcealing always go together, and there is no objective way to see things within this way of knowing and seeing things. Heidegger provides at least a better understanding of the unfolding of truth that would seem more in line with an understanding of *dao* as "the way things are."

The Western notions of being and nothing are important in metaphysical philosophy, and Graham was of course right to note that we should not conflate *you* and *wu* with any superficial likeness to being and nothing. However, we could ask ourselves if a comparison becomes more fruitful once the terms being and nothing get radically rethought,

as has happened in the case of Heidegger? Consider the following: “We have for a long time been accustomed to set being opposite becoming, as if becoming were a kind of nothingness and did not even belong to being; and this because being has for a long time been understood to be nothing else than sheer perdurance” (1975, 31). Here Heidegger tries to rethink the metaphysics behind the ontological presence. For him, being is no longer to be opposed to nothing or to becoming, but it is the whole process of being that rather includes becoming and nothing. Absence and presence and growth and decay belong to the same process.

Here it would be instructive to consider Nietzsche’s affirmation of life. In Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal return, we find the similar idea that all is in continuous flux, and that this is something to be welcomed: “Everything goes, everything returns; eternally rolls the wheel of existence. Everything dies, everything blossoms forth again. . . . All things separate, all things again greet one another; eternally true to itself remains the ring of existence” (1885, 232).

In Heidegger’s terms, such a process philosophy is stated in the following passage, where he talks about the “proper” understanding of being not as presence, but as lingering: “Whatever lingers awhile in presence comes to presence insofar as it lingers; all the while, emerging and passing away, and the jointure of the transition from approach and withdrawal, continue. This lingering endurance of the transition is the enjoined continuance of what is present. The enjoined continuance does not at all insist upon sheer persistence” (Heidegger 1975, 43-44).

Effectively seeking to destruct the metaphysical readings of eternal substance and presence, Heidegger succeeds in creating a way of thinking close to Daoism in its approach to change and transition from being to nothing, as he seems to understand these terms closer to the ideas of being present and being absent as part of the same process. While I am still uncertain whether this will give us a better approximation of the characters *you* and *wu* as used in Daoism, I firmly believe that this way of understanding being and nothing is much closer to the way Daoists think.

Related to this, Heidegger’s ontological difference may be considered a candidate for understanding what is meant by *dao*. Being is different from beings, because being is not a being, but at the same time beings *are*. If being is thought not as a metaphysical principle, then understand-

ing *dao* along such lines may be illuminating. Although I am definitely not suggesting that being and *dao* are in any way interchangeable, there is definite merit in employing the ontological difference in our quest to understand what is meant by *dao* in a Western language, even if this language is Heideggerian.

Derrida

To illustrate the compatibility between Derrida and Daoism in this area I will focus on the notion of "trace." Derrida employs many terms with regard to this trace thinking, which have definite parallels to *dao*, if read as way-making. In this context, "breaching" (Ger.: *Bahnung*; Fr.: *frayage*) is important in Derrida's thought. "Spacing" and "supplement" are other terms that appear here.

In my view, these terms stand for the play of otherness, of differences, that which no longer belongs to presence, and has no real origin or source. Derrida calls this play of *différance* temporization (Derrida 1982, 8), implicitly bringing attention to the deferral aspect of his thought. Presence is always deferred, traces are all we have. The trace for Derrida is that which is "[a]lways differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating..." (1982, 23).

Trace(s) are thus not to be understood as traces of some deeper origin behind their appearances: "The trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, it properly has no site—erasure belongs to its structure" (1982, 24). The fact that *différance* is "the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names" (1982, 26) does not mean that there is something outside of this play that would function as a metaphysical guiding principle. The play is all there is.

Understanding *dao* in this manner it becomes impossible to see it as a metaphysical principle, since that already implies that there is something guiding something else, before something else, a presence before the trace. Consider the *Daode jing*: "Way-making [*dao*] is the flowing together of all things (ch. 63; Ames and Hall 2003, 173). This passage suggests a process thinking comparable to Derrida's trace: there is nothing behind the flowing together of things, meaning first that there is no guid-

ing principle behind it, and second that all things flow together in the sense that they have traces in each other. There are only traces.

Other *Daode jing* passages can be read in a similar way. Chapter 1 mentions that *dao* is ineffable, but this need not be because it would be some metaphysical principle, but because as the whole of everything flowing together, it cannot be given a name without reducing it to something *within* that flow. Chapters 4, 6, and 14 describe *dao* as elusive, as only seemingly there, validating the idea that there is no getting beyond the traces. Chapter 21 takes a similar position:

As for the process of way-making,
It is ever so indefinite and vague.
Though vague and indefinite,
There are images within it.
Though indefinite and vague,
There are events within it. (Ames and Hall 2003, 107)

A traditional metaphysical interpretation of this passage would suggest that behind the appearances, which are vague and indeterminate, there is a real presence, a sort of Platonic world of principles, forms, or ideas. Reading with Derrida, I see this passage as meaning that within context, only differences function and thus only traces are to be found. The context itself is nothing else than this play of differences, but *within* that context and arising *out of* context, there are indeed references or images. These references or images however never refer to that full presence suggested by the metaphysical tradition.

There is thus in Daoism a thoroughly contextual approach where everything is related and this-worldly. It is here where we can begin to appreciate the non-metaphysical approach in Daoism. For example, Zhuangzi, in Hansen's words, "invokes no contrast between a world of appearance, a sensible world that is in flux, and a world of thought and reasons, and abstract unchanging one" (2010, 48). He also argues convincingly that the mentions of a "true ruler" should not be read in a metaphysical way, but rather as skeptical assertions of the possibility of such a true ruler (2010, 42-44). The *Zhuangzi* states something comparable. Where everything has a "this" and a "that," full presence is repudiated and the way is opened for an understanding that focuses on traces. As

Zhuangzi says:

There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between this being and nonbeing, I do not really know which is being and which is nonbeing. (ch. 2; Watson 2003, 38)

We can always take one further step, and as such any Truth with a capital T or *dao* will always be deferred. Traces are all that is left.

The play of yin and yang forces important in Daoism also suggests that otherness is always already there. Yin is always yin becoming yang, and vice versa. There is a continuous process; hence we cannot perceive things other than as infinite traces only identifiable within or through an ever increasing context. Before the beginning, there is another beginning, and so on. Thus beginning never really refers to some metaphysical principle that started the process, but can only make sense from within the process. I see this also as corroborated by the birthing metaphors and the focus on generation within a system in the *Laozi*, rather than ideas of creation by some outside force.

Thought of in this way, outside and inside then become categories that are no longer strictly separable. Graham describes this thought in a persuasive manner: "Perhaps *Laozi's* Way is how the Trace will look to us when we are no longer haunted by the ghost of that transcendent Reality the death of which Derrida proclaims" (1989, 228).

Knowing Process and Overcoming Dualism

Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida challenge preconceived and dominant notions of truth, reference, identity and wholeness or completeness, thus opening the way for new understandings of relationality and difference, which have strong connections to process philosophy where change is important and stability is relative. Instead of the usual metaphysical attempt to halt the process, continental thought aims to show that this is not possible, nor desirable. It is of course true that the process thought present in pragmatism can capture some of this in a different

way, but it seems that this interplay of different particulars, this relationality or interdependence, is more clearly brought out in continental thought.

Consider some of these examples: process philosophy is present in Heidegger's *Ereignis* (event of appropriation) and in his concept of the *Geviert* (fourfold). Both actively seek to engage or rather reinstate humans within a configuration of the world, rather than to abstract them from it, as happens in the dualist metaphysical distinctions of subject/object, mind/body, form/matter. And such thought is present in the idea of being as becoming in Nietzsche, as well as in Derrida's *différance* and trace thinking. Man is put back into the world, and the knowing of the subject becomes at best secondary to the knowing experience of continuity. In the case of Daoism we find a similar approach, as Hall and Ames put it: "Knowledge is always proximate as the condition of an experience rather than of an isolated experience. Situation has primacy, and agency is an abstraction from it" (1998, 220).

Zhuangzi similarly disparages conventional knowledge in favor of the kind of knowing that sees the self as one or continuous with the world. Knowledge (*zhi*) only arises when man artificially separates himself from the world, subject from object, mind from matter, and artificially creates distinctions between things at the price of the continuity or wholeness. Ames and Hall suggest that any form of philosophy that sees knowledge in this way, based on ontological presence, is not suited for understanding Daoism.

Wuzhi . . . actually means the absence of a certain kind of knowledge—the kind of knowledge that is dependent upon ontological presence: that is, the assumption that there is some unchanging reality behind appearance. Knowledge grounded in a denial of ontological presence involves acosmotic thinking: the type of thinking that does not presuppose a single-ordered ("One behind the many") world, and its intellectual accoutrements. It is, therefore, *unprincipled* knowing. (Ames and Hall 2003, 40)

Then it would be the case that those ways of thinking that actively seek to attack that form of thought based on ontological presence would be more conducive to comparisons with Daoism, and this is exactly what continental philosophy is all about.

We could relate this to *Gelassenheit* (releasement) and *wuwei* 無為 (non-assertive action). Heidegger sees representational thought as wrongful abstractions, whereas the real way of knowing and being is found in *Gelassenheit*, which indicates a belonging to the earth in the constellation of *Geviert*, connected to such ideas as *Ereignis* and *entsprechen*. Although at first *Gelassenheit* and *wuwei* sound passive, a closer examination reveals that it is about undoing the dichotomy between passive and active, and according to Heidegger entails a "higher acting" (1966, 61). It is not just letting things be; this requires effort in an active opening up of your own thought structures, necessary for other ways of thinking to find an entrance.

Daoist thinkers similarly perceive this in terms of spontaneity and non-interference with the way the world is, using a terminology that seeks to express an attitude of openness and respectful responsiveness to the world, quite similar to what we also see in Heidegger and Derrida. *Wuwei* is not non-doing, but a certain kind of doing which seeks not to impose or interfere with the natural inclinations of things to be themselves.

Although Derrida has no term similar to *Gelassenheit* or *wuwei*, his thoughts on otherness could be instructive here. Without going into details, whenever Derrida talks about otherness, he insists that otherness is always already inserted into self or identity, but that traditionally, philosophy as metaphysics has insisted on denying otherness in favor of self-sameness. In short, Derrida argues we must re-prepare to let the other come, because this other is not something we can summon in neither our language nor our conceptuality. Rather, it is something that has to come of its own, "[y]et it is necessary to prepare for it; to allow the coming of the entirely other, passivity, a certain kind of resigned passivity for which everything comes down to the same, is not suitable. Letting the other come is not inertia ready for anything whatever" (2007, 39).

In comparative philosophy, this injunction is of special importance. Comparative thinking must seek to find a way in which otherness can show itself as itself, but this is complicated immediately by the fact that other and self are always already inserted, and that we can only approach otherness from a certain perspective. This realization is what thinking along the lines of Heidegger and Derrida seek to convey, and

can then be used to understand ideas as spontaneity and non-assertive action.

Another similarity in relation to dualism lies in the denial of the importance of transcendence or a creator or higher principle for both continental thinking and Daoism. Ames and Hall have argued for the absence of any real importance of transcendence or creator gods at length. Heidegger and Nietzsche employ a similar strategy: they do not deny that there may be gods, but they definitely deny that such gods should have any import on thinking. Gods are mentioned in Daoism, but play no important role in the way of thought and life proposed by either Laozi or Zhuangzi. And of course both Heidegger and Nietzsche have argued that bringing gods into philosophy, or rather bringing religion into philosophy, is the worst one can do. A system of thought, or a philosophy, should be enough by itself, and need not have recourse to outside transcendental principles, especially not in the form of gods.

Whenever gods do enter thought, they appear as intimately connected to this world, in fact as not apart from it. Heidegger understands the *Geviert* as heaven and earth and man in one. Zhuangzi relates a similar understanding when he has Lao Dan describe the interchanges between yin and yang, heaven and earth and all the myriad things rising, transforming and decaying, and then ask: "What else but this is the Ancestor from which we descend?" (Graham 2001, 130). The ancestor is not something different from the process; it *is* the continuous process of generation.

The last similarity to do with dualism lies in Heidegger's thoughts about the same and the identical (*das Selbe* and *das Gleiche*). We should avoid trying to make things identical (what Heidegger calls *das Gleiche*), but we should treat them as being similar in a different way, which translates Heidegger's notion "the same" (*das Selbe*). As he says: "But the same is not the merely identical. In the merely identical, the difference disappears. In the same the difference appears" (1969, 45). It is vital to be clear on the difference between the same and the identical. The same is not a metaphysical construct; it is not an overarching concept, but only functions because of difference. Heidegger says:

The same never coincides with the equal, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves

toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say the same if we think difference. (1971, 216)

The identical then is part of a typical metaphysical striving for identity, generalization, and unity. Things that are the same should not be forced to become identical. Sameness only exists as a function of difference. Differences, or the play of differences, must be understood as the more originary.

How does all this overcome dualism? One would think Heidegger looks like a proponent of dualism here. Yet, on closer inspection, it is the tendency of metaphysical dualism to "reduce all differences to a common denominator," to deny diversity by appealing to a higher, unitary principle. Instead, giving diversity, difference, room, is part of a kind of thinking that is indeed plural but not hierarchical or oppositional in dualist fashion.

Zhuangzi observes that "the wisest, because they have a full view of far and near, do not belittle the smaller or make much of the greater, knowing that measuring has no limit" (ch. 17; Graham 2001, 145-46). The sages see all things as the same, and with Heidegger, we can now see that this does not reduce those things to a oneness, but rather to a continuity in the sense of a belonging together. Ames and Hall mention that in Daoist philosophy, in the absence of a One-behind-the-many-metaphysics, "difference is prior to identifiable similarities" (2003, 14), but such differences are only in an intimate relationship. For example, in the *Daode jing*, "determinacy (*you*) and indeterminacy (*wu*) give rise to each other" (2003, 80). "Grasping oneness," for example, in chapters 10 and 22, lies in acknowledging the interminable interplay of differences so pervasive in Daoism. Even the oneness in chapter 42 can be understood as the continuous harmonizing of yin and yang, and needs not be understood as a reduction to oneness in the sense of identity or unity.

The Use and Limits of Language

So far we can say that in its efforts to overcome dualism continental philosophy has been forging new paths of inquiry, opening up new avenues of thought and re-connecting what may seem to be separate identities. In this attempt the continental thinkers have found themselves struggling with the language of metaphysics as well. Continental philosophy has challenged the metaphysical language of presence in many ways. Nietzsche pointed out long ago that language and culture have much to do with each other, and that the metaphysical system owes much to the possibilities and employment of language.

Where there is an affinity of languages, then because of the common philosophy of grammar (I mean: due to the unconscious domination and direction through similar grammatical functions), it is obvious that everything lies ready from the very start for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; on the other hand, the way seems as good as blocked for certain other possibilities of interpreting the world. (2002, 20)

The Sapir-Whorf thesis on linguistic relativism, too, supports such ideas. Thus that Zarathustra can say, “New paths do I thread, a new speech comes to me; tired have I become—like all creators—of the old tongues” (Nietzsche 1886, 82). The “old tongues” of Western thinking are metaphysical to the core, and since metaphysical languages are representational, in general they do not provide a good match for the worldview of classical Daoism. Continental philosophy opens up not only possible equivalents or similarities to Daoist thought, by rethinking language it also opens up the space between them in a different way. For that space to get actualized, new ways of understanding and using language are needed.

Many scholars have already argued that the classical Chinese language is substantially different from Western languages, and that this difference results in important differences in doing philosophy. In multiple ways, comparative scholars have acknowledged that the efforts of continental philosophy here might have some benefit to bring to comparative philosophy. As Hall and Ames have it, “The movement from representational to non-representational understandings of knowledge

and truth might well provide an appropriate bridge to the consideration of classical Chinese sensibilities on these topics" (1998, 144).

Derrida has said something similar. In his work, *Of Grammatology*, he argues, "Logocentrism is an ethnocentric metaphysics. It is related to the history of the West" (1976, 79). Later, he hypothesizes that we have in the classical Chinese language "the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" (1976, 90).

The idea of non-phonetic writing, or at least of a non-phonetic moment or movement in writing, which Derrida saw present in the Chinese language, is important since it "menaces substantiality, that other metaphysical name of presence and of *ousia*. First in the form of the substantive. Nonphonetic writing breaks the noun apart. It describes relations and not appellations" (1976, 26). The menace to substantiality and presence lies in the fact that systems of language are not closed to change. Hansen has argued that Daoism, and especially Zhuangzi, were well aware of the provisionality of language systems. "There is nothing ultimate or constant in such systems. And, as the *Laozi* points out, the reason no such discourse is constant is that language (names) is inconstant—artificial, conventional, changeable. No *dao* is constant because no name is constant" (Hansen 2010, 36).

Overall, we can say that metaphysical language has limited possibilities, and that seeing language differently may indeed be conducive for understanding how the Daoists saw things differently, and thus expressed them differently.

A Different Approach

In the case of continental philosophy, the most important strategy used is what I would call the stretching of language, which includes the formulation of neologisms and the twisting of grammatical functions. In Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida this becomes the way they try to open up thought structures that are otherwise too embedded within the Western metaphysical history.

According to Nietzsche, language in general, and especially metaphysical language, is not up to the task of showing us the process character of the world. "Linguistic means of expression are useless for expressing becoming; it accords with our inevitable need to preserve ourselves

to posit a crude world of stability, of things" (1967, 380). Highly suspicious of language as this metaphysical stability generator, Nietzsche says that it can nevertheless be used in new ways: "it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new things" (1974, 122). Far from discarding language, which he sees as metaphorical in its core, Nietzsche urges us to accept the inherently metaphorical nature of language, and to create new metaphors and to use language freely, as he himself consequently does.

Perhaps the most profound attempt at using language differently lies in Heidegger. He uses language in various ways to overcome the shortcomings of metaphysical language, and was in these endeavors most certainly inspired in some way by Eastern thought, and mostly by Laozi and Zhuangzi. From his ideas of *Geviert* to *Ereignis*, from crossing out being or writing it as *beyng*, Heidegger did explore all the richness of language at his disposal. But also in his appropriation and retranslation or reinterpretation of the ancient Greeks, etymologically rigorous, but also challengingly difficult, Heidegger used language to point to a different way of thinking.

With his free use of language also came the realization that there were things that cannot be said, the shortcomings of language are inherent and point us to the openness to mystery. "That the essential sway of be-ing is never definitely sayable does not indicate a lack. On the contrary, it indicates that the non-definite knowing precisely holds fast the *abgrund* of, and thus the essential sway of, be-ing" (1999, 324). The mystery of the abyss (*Abgrund*) is not to be feared, but embraced. Just as much as *dao* cannot be spoken, since it is the whole of the ten thousand things flowing together, being must be crossed out or it will be perceived as a being.

One of the most pertinent examples of Heidegger's more daring exploits of language conducive to understanding Daoism appears in his verbalization of nouns. Phrases such as *Das Ding dingt*, the *Welt weltet*, explore the process character through the shortcomings of metaphysical language. Heidegger means with this that there is nothing behind the process of things *thinging* or of the world *worlding*.

This understanding is prevalent in Chinese philosophy in general. For example, in Confucius we find the idea of the father fathering, the son sonning etc. And according to Hall and Ames, classical "Chinese

language is not logocentric. Words do not name essences. Rather, they indicate always-transitory processes and events. It is important, therefore, to stress the gerundative character of the language. The language of process is vague, allusive, and suggestive" (2001, 16). Graham, too, makes this point (1989, 227).

This can be used to help understand that *dao* is nothing other than *wanwu*. Way-making is the myriad things thinging. Heidegger argues extensively in *Das Ding* that the true nature of thinging lies in the four-fold, and "stays earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Staying [*verweilend*], the thing brings the four, in their remoteness, near to one another" (1971, 175). Further on, he puts the interplay in this way: "None of the four insists on its own separate particularity. Rather, each is expropriated, within their mutual appropriation, into its own being. This expropriative appropriating is the mirror-play of the fourfold" (1971, 177).

Then he mentions that "in the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness [*unbedingt*]" (1971, 178-79). His play with language reveals our interdependence, or relationality, in a profound way. *Dao* is nothing other than the interplay of all things or processed, but at the same time this interplay is what keeps everything hanging together. In their thinging, all things connect and bring together the larger whole.

Much can, and has been said, against Nietzsche's aphoristic way of writing, Heidegger's dense jargon, and Derrida's playful style, to the extent that they have been accused of not being real philosophers, since they do not play by the rules and are too vague, allusive, and suggestive. Still, I think that this is exactly what puts such thinkers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida into the nearness of Daoism. I do not mean to say that Daoism is therefore not philosophy and is not rigorous, but I state that the dominant metaphysical tradition is too narrow-minded in its thinking and thus or because of that in its language is not able to do justice to the richness of Daoist thought. Perhaps it is exactly in the stretching of language, and in the search for forgotten or new ways of meaning, that comparative philosophy finds its place.

Translation and Enlarging the Discourse

Although both Nietzsche and Heidegger have written about translation, here I only work on Derrida to explain how the continental thinkers think about turning different kinds of thinking into Western discourse. Derrida's impact lies in the realization that meaning is never pure; it is influenced or contaminated by language. In the words of Zhuangzi, as soon as we start making discriminations, something is inevitable lost.

Relating this to the practice of translation, an ever important topic for comparative philosophy, Derrida denies the possibility of the ultimate goal of translation. He notes that he does "not believe that translation is a secondary and derived event in relation to an original language or text" (in Wood and Bernasconi 1988, 5). By questioning the status of what is traditionally seen as the original text, Derrida does not deny that there is a text translated or transformed into another, but questions the idea that the original means anything *outside* of or *without* its ever expanding context, which consists precisely of its interpretations and translations. What he calls the demand of the original for translation may well be the inevitable and continuing *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the original. Derrida challenges the fullness or purity of any identity (the text to be translated), and rather understands identity as relative to difference and interpretation (the text translated) and as such, living.

A serious problem in comparative philosophy is not only that translation is always transformation or interpretation, but that this interpretation "does not begin . . . with what is commonly called translation. It begins as soon as *a certain type of reading* of the original text is *instituted*" (Derrida 2004, 19; italics added). Consulting Derrida's work on translation, we may make more sense of the fact that there is really no one meaning to any original Daoist work. Meaning only arises out of interpretations, something which the actual *Wirkungsgeschichte* or evolution of the Daoist texts through their commentaries and interpretations endorses.

I suggest that one of the functions of comparative philosophy is similar in that in and through its comparisons, it questions standard (or instituted) conceptions, interpretations, and explanations. Traditional Western metaphysics typically offers those from a place between different philosophical traditions. This means first that culturally different paradigms of thinking need to be confident that their ideas will not be

appropriated by comparative philosophy, since that is what has usually been instituted as our normal type of reading. It also means that the relationality between different philosophical traditions must be reconsidered.

As regards this second point, Derrida explains the contextuality or relationality inherent in his thought by saying "that nothing exists outside context . . . , but also that the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of non-closure. The outside penetrates and thus determines the inside" (1988, 152-53). Context itself is not only constitutive of any identity, yet it can never be closed off: it is structurally and inherently open. Naming it *the* context would even be wrong, as this could still suggest a closed context with an identifiable content. Similarly, translating *dao* as "the Way" ignores the fact that *dao* is largely processual, and in a way it is similar to context, of which Derrida says it is nothing more or less than "the entire real-history-of-the-world" (1988, 136). In this regard, *dao* is like context: "Way-making [*dao*] is the flowing together of all things" (*Daode jing* 62; Hall and Ames 2003, 173),

When comparative philosophy is not well served by referring to the metaphysical conceptual frameworks, it is necessary to enlarge the philosophical discourse. Derrida is interested in liberating thinking from what has become the too stringent metaphysical and analytical philosophy. He cares about "a thinking, let's say, that is not confined within the particular way of thinking that is philosophy or science. There are forms, . . . there are perhaps *pensées* that are more thinking than this kind of thinking called philosophy" (1995, 202).

This move reminds us of Heidegger's statement that there might be "greater thinkers" (1963, 24) outside of Western philosophy. Derrida's deconstructions entail a thinking which is no longer purely philosophical, or it is differently philosophical, in that it questions the traditionally philosophical from various standpoints which are themselves not necessarily philosophical in the traditional sense. Such deconstructions are "perhaps no longer scientific or philosophical, in the sense in which these words can be determined today. It is in fact this indetermination and this very opening that we designate . . . by the word 'thinking'" (2004, 202-03).

Like Derrida, the strategic provocations employed by Zhuangzi are not about the total meaninglessness of words but about the mistake of assigning dogmatically fixed meanings. Essentially, both Derrida and

Zhuangzi are aware that there is no way they can ever permanently escape the workings of language, and they accordingly challenge the inflexibility or determinateness of the ways of thinking in which they were brought up. It is not language per se that they are against, it is the absolutist way in which it gets interpreted and used. They wish to replace it with a sense of indetermination. Such indetermination sounds challenging to us since through our languages we have become so accustomed to our metaphysical heritage, that it is very hard to even conceive of profoundly different ways of thinking, especially ways of thinking that would like to leave certain things open.

Style

All this goes to say that a way of thinking and a language have much in common. Ever since Sapir-Whorf some version of linguistic relativism is plausible. It stands to logic then that not only would critics of the dominant way of thinking seek to stretch language to try to think differently, they would naturally also change style. Indeed, this is what we see in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Daoism (especially Zhuangzi).

Nietzsche has a major influence in the area of language use. Not necessarily known as an inventor of new words, he was nevertheless profoundly different in his writings, and knew well how style and content go together (e.g., 2002, 29-30). As such, he did not really argue in the same way as philosophers had done, but pointed very much to philosophy's shortcomings and mocked existing morality and culture. Nietzsche recognized that in order to be effective in this endeavour, he needed to have a style to match.

We thus see a blending and appreciation of the literary aspects of philosophy more in these continental thinkers. Such is present in Heidegger's ruminations on thinking and poetry, and in his later, meditative thinking and writing, and are part and parcel of Derrida's work and its playful, but incredibly dense style, as well as Nietzsche's highly metaphoric and narrative style and his briefness or aphoristic language.

The play with words that characterizes especially Zhuangzi is matched in Derrida. Both display a great awareness of the provisionality of language. Mark Berkson has argued that this kind of language use points to an apophatic or denying intention. Examples include

Heidegger's crossing out of being, Derrida's "under erasure," Zhuangzi's turning his attacks on himself, Nietzsche's awareness of the futility or the perspective nature of his own attempts, and Laozi's admission that *dao* cannot be spoken about while yet writing a book about it. All these point to two things: direct or representational language is impossible, and the way things then are said has to be different. Berkson argues convincingly that the language use of Derrida and Zhuangzi—but we could extend that to the other thinkers—aims at forming a pact with the reader, and thereby inviting the reader to do more than just read, but to become involved on many other levels through and by the text (1996, 109-13).

To read the continentals and Daoism is very much an aesthetic experience. For example, by letting words explode against each other, by exploiting the fullest range of meanings of any term, by bringing out ambiguities and inconsistencies, Zhuangzi and Derrida show us how language is not up to the promise of pure medium. We are trapped in a way because we have to use language, meaning we are always in a web of signification and can only operate from within this web. This is something the classical Chinese philosophical tradition was aware of much earlier than that of the West. However, if this is understood as possibility, then Heidegger, Derrida and Daoism advocate a use of language that seeks to explore it to its fullest possibilities, and this with full awareness of its dangers and limitations, rather than discard it. Again as Graham puts it, speaking of Zhuangzi (but the passage could equally well apply to Derrida or Nietzsche):

In one of his many aspects he is himself a true sophist, fascinated by the subversion of received opinions and intoxicated by the plunge which imperils rationality in the course of discovering its possibilities. He is also, even in the flow of reason itself, a poet who changes course as new insights explode, elliptical even when most logical. One of his persisting thoughts is that in accepting what fits in with one's ideas as 'this' and rejecting what does not, analytic thinking lights up only a lesser whole around the thinker and casts the rest into darkness. (1989, 178)

Yet it is also to be said that both the continental thinkers and Daoists are aware that this is somewhat inevitable, and that language style thus

needs to change. In Graham's words, as he says about Laozi and Derrida: "Both use a language which already escapes the opposition logic and poetry, a language in which contradictory statements do not cancel out, because if made in the appropriate sequence or combination they set you in the true direction" (1989, 227).

A different style is used to set the reader in a different way, to entice her into a different style of thinking. Great emphasis is also put on the idea of silence as conveyor or thought. That of which one cannot speak in any style, one should be silent about. Yet although we know language is artificial and that silence is better, we must overcome even this dichotomy in a thoughtful saying aware of its own shortcomings. "In what is neither speech nor silence may discussion find its ultimate" (Graham 2001, 153). "Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?" (Watson 2003, 141). Or in the words of Heidegger: "The truly fateful encounter with historic language is a silent event [*Ereignis*]. But in it the destiny of being speaks" (1975, 57).

Criticism of the Self

Although there are perceived similarities between continental and Daoist thought, the cultural and philosophical environments in which these similarities arose are vastly different. Daoists never had to agitate against a system that isolates subject from object, self from other, agent from action, and mind from matter. They never needed to undo such strict notions of self, agent, or person. Continental thinkers, on the other hand, worked hard to overcome the metaphysical dominance in this area.

It may well be that the typically modern Western notions of self or identity do not feature in any prominent way in classical Chinese thought. It is certainly quite realistic to say that something like the Subject-Object distinction was not really present in Daoism. I will therefore use the terms "self," "subject," and "personhood" with some license and without making the finer distinctions between them only made in modern Western metaphysics. Despite these cautions and divergences, the end result conceptions of what a person or self is are remarkably similar, and lie again in the similar tendency not to abstract the particular from the totality.

Next, I must admit that most of Nietzsche's thoughts regarding the self or person do not really fit in well with what the Daoist sage should be. Nietzsche was passionate about the strong and noble person who exerted the will to power, and he seems to have had little respect or affection for the person as embedded within a tradition. But that may have had to do more with his particular tradition, which he saw as degenerate. Nevertheless, to compare the *Übermensch* with the Daoist sage in terms of self or person, as has been done, would be pushing it on many levels. For one, although both the *Übermensch* and the Daoist sage share a certain strength of character, the way they use it is vastly different.

Where Nietzsche's *Übermensch* sets out to assert power and control, and makes much of solitude, we obviously do not find such intentions with the Daoist sage of Zhuangzi, although there may be something to be said for it in Laozi's ruler. Yet there are some similarities that surface in Nietzsche's understanding of the self. In the Zarathustra, Nietzsche argues that the self is not the mind or some abstract thing, but resides in, or rather is, the body (1886, 29-30). But I confess that this is where in this case the similarities seem to end. Nietzsche is evidently against the yielding and non-interfering attitude of the Daoist. But he nevertheless does have interesting criticisms on the metaphysical conception of the self, so his thoughts may be useful there.

Resituating the Self

There are many suggestions that the relation of self to otherness that prevails in metaphysics is in dire need of rethinking, and again, this is what continental philosophy has primarily focused on. The dualist approach has it that the self or subject is isolated or abstracted from its world, and that the true or real self, subject or identity lies exactly in this abstraction. Retractable to a large extent to Descartes's *cogito*, the metaphysical tradition sees the self as an abstract entity, both separate from the world and self-sufficient, and as an enduring, non-physical substance behind the changing external world. In this sense the metaphysical idea of the self is a perfect example of the 'one behind the many' approach. But such a view is highly artificial, and underscores again the abstracting tendencies of the metaphysical tradition. But the continental thinkers have criticised this belief in such a self or subjectivity in many ways.

Subsequently, because they criticize the metaphysical idea of self, continental thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida are frequently accused of attempting a nihilistic eradication of concepts such as self, identity, or subject. This is patently false. What they do want to highlight is that the traditional metaphysical understanding of these concepts is in need of serious revision. In Derrida's words,

To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, 'operations' or 'effects' [*effets*] of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it *says* it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure *cogito* of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it. (in Kearney 1984, 125)

The continental thinkers definitely do not want to give up on the idea of self or identity, but to reinvestigate how a self is produced or formed. There is a similar perspective in classical Chinese thinking. For example, Youru Wang states that Zhuangzi's "forgetting" of the self

plays at the boundary between self and non-self. While it transcends the closure of self, it does not attempt to annihilate all individual lives. It merely opens their closure and leads them to the authenticity of life that lies precisely in the absence of the distinction between self and other. (2000, 355).

Nietzsche also recognises the fictionality of the metaphysical idea of a substantial "subject" behind the appearances of a changing subject: "The subject: this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality. . . .The subject is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum" (1967, 268-69).

Decentering the subject or rethinking selfhood or identity does not totally negate self, but rather resituates it by undoing the artificial and hierarchical distinctions such as mind/body, or self/other. Heidegger, for example, talks about *Dasein* instead of human being or subject. Being-there (*Da-sein*) suggests a situational and always particular (*jemeinig*) point of view, without this particularity being subsumed under the Subject-Object distinction. The idea of *Dasein* instead of human being is

meant to point to the simple fact that we are *in* the world. *Dasein* is not man as subject, but "that belongingness that, holding unto the ab-ground, belongs to the clearing of be-ing" (Heidegger 2006, 286). Elsewhere Heidegger talks about how a self is only generated by understanding it from its embeddedness in the world first:

Transcendence means to understand oneself from a world. *Dasein* is as such out beyond itself. Only a being to whose ontological constitution transcendence belongs has the possibility of being anything like a self. Transcendence is even the presupposition for *Dasein's* having a character of a self. The selfhood of *Dasein* is founded on its transcendence, and *Dasein* is not first an ego-self, which then oversteps something or other. (1982, 300)

We can also see how Heidegger uses the metaphysical language in different ways. Transcendence for him is not some otherworldly thing, it is firmly grounded in the world here. Zhuangzi gives us a similar message: "Without an Other there is no Self, without Self no choosing one thing rather than another" (Graham 2001, 51). The idea of a self or identity is not totally denied, but said to arise only as a function of relationality.

Similarly, Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* (appropriation, event, happening; see Heidegger 1989) suggests thinking beyond the subject-object dichotomy, in the sense that the subject is always already included in the event. The subject belongs to the more primordial event and can only be derivatively understood from *Ereignis*. This idea is similar to the idea of *dao* as interpreted by Hall and Ames in terms of focus and field. According to them, *dao* is way-making (2003). The basic similarity lies in the fact that both the notions of *Ereignis* and *dao* as way-making make it clear that the spotlight is on the focal self as embedded in the world as field. Again, *er-eignen* as appropriating, or *dao* as way-making, should not be read metaphysically as a subject appropriating an object to itself, making it its own, or possessing an object. Both *Ereignis* and *dao* are better understood as processes, referring to both the singular processes of entities and the entire process of the world within which humanity belongs.

As such this leads to the idea that "within the open expanse of unconcealment each lingering being (*weiliges*) becomes present to every other lingering being" (Heidegger 1975, 47). Any idea of self only arises

out of such interdependence or becoming present. The same idea is expressed in *Zhuangzi*: “the myriad things and I are one” (Graham 2001, 56). Not only is it necessary for a self to begin or arise from the other, but it is better not to see self and other as *detached*, since if we focus too much on the individual self, we will be too one-sided in our appreciation of the multifaceted process called *dao*. It is also in this sense that we must understand Zhuangzi’s “The utmost man is selfless” (2001, 45).

Again, this reading does not require a denial of identity, personhood, or self. Rather it requires a deeper understanding of the self as *fundamentally* relational. This reading does not try to secure or abstract the self or its essence *from* the world of change, as does the traditional metaphysical interpretation, but seeks instead to *locate* the self within a world of change and arising out of such a world, rather than standing opposed to it.

The Pluralist Person

So, how should such a selfless person be understood? After analyzing the characters for self or person and the context in which they are used by Zhuangzi, Chris Jochim comes to the conclusion that modern notions of self are not applicable to Zhuangzi, and that Zhuangzi’s has a “pluralistic conception of the person, not a unitary one built concentrically around an inner, spiritual core” (1998, 53). This coincides quite closely with what continental thinkers have proposed. In Nietzsche’s terms, “The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general” (1967, 270). Or, as David Hall notes, “The postmodern, plural, aesthetic self has an awareness of its plurality and the insistent particularity of the elements that variously focus that plurality. This aesthetic self-consciousness rehearses the Taoist vision of no-soul, no-self” (1994, 232).

This leaves us with the relationship between self and other. It would be natural to expect that if the self is rather seen in terms of a person embedded within a world, that the relationship between self and other would be radically different from that of modern Western metaphysics. Zhuangzi speaks of the daemoniac man (*shenren*) whenever he speaks of

the person who is no longer as self, but through whom heaven (*tian*) is acting. Graham says that then "the self dissolves, energies strange to him and higher than his own (the daemonic) enter from outside, the agent of his actions is no longer the man but Heaven working through him" (2001, 69). Cook Ding says that "nowadays in am in touch through the daemonic in me, and do not look with the eye" (2001, 63). In Heidegger, and to a certain extent in Derrida, language speaks through us.

Heidegger acknowledges that an *Auseinandersetzung* or confrontation with the other is necessary for any self to become itself, but it must be noted that this encounter is not a mere appropriation or incorporation of the other. The other as other is not to be overcome in a dialectic way; it is the encounter that matters, so that "The appropriation of one's own is only *as* the encounter [*Auseinandersetzung*] and guest-like dialogue with the foreign" (1996, 142). The encounter does not presuppose two different identities; it is rather that the identities are side effects of the more primordial encounter. In Daoism, as Hall and Ames have it,

Spontaneous action is a mirroring response. As such, it is action that accommodates the "other" to whom one is responding. It takes the other on its own terms. Such spontaneity involves recognizing the continuity between oneself and the other, and responding in such a way that one's own actions promote the interests and well-being both of oneself and of the other. (2003, 24)

In early Heideggerian terminology, *Dasein* is always *Mitsein* (being-with), and its way of being is *Sorge* (care). The previously discussed four-fold (*Geviert*) of the later Heidegger similarly suggests that we, as mortals, are part of the world in a unity with the heavens, earth and divinities, and thus to care for ourselves we have to care for the world. Such thinking is also found in the Daoist sages, who in *Daode jing* 7 satisfy their own needs by being unselfish. We can also see such thinking back in chapters 22 and 81. As Hall and Ames note:

In a world where process and change are deemed prior to form and rest, there can be little incentive to develop notions of discrete agency. From the classical Chinese perspective, agents cannot be decontextualized and superordinated. . . . Agency and action, subject and object, are not contraries, but interchangeable aspects of a single category: experience. (1998, 227)

Conclusion

There are many resources in continental philosophy that would make it easier to understand classical Daoism and that would be conducive to the comparative endeavor of relating different thoughts from vastly different traditions and times to each other. Continental thinkers have given us tools to overcome the inherent dualism in most of Western philosophy, using reversal strategies that in the end seek to upset the dualistic tendencies.

They also show how we could use language differently, important for translation strategies and to see how we could understand our place as persons in the world. I do not make the claim that there are no other vocabularies or ways of thinking that might also be conducive to such endeavors, but I do think that the struggle against the metaphysical dominance that is apparent in the continental thinkers I have discussed is of great use for understanding Daoism as a non-metaphysical way of thought.

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